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EASTERN EUROPEAN INTELLIGENCER

OCI #0732/68
24 June 1968Cordial Atmosphere of Brandt-Abrasimov Talks

The Brandt-Abrasimov talk on 18 June was described as "very warm and friendly," with both men calling each other by their first names and using the German familiar form "du," according to a West Berlin journalist who spoke with Soviet and West German functionaries involved.

Abrasimov reportedly was pleased with the talk and considered the most important result Brandt's assurance that "rightist elements" in the Bonn government would not gain the upper hand in the Grand Coalition at the expense of those pursuing a policy of detente with Moscow. Abrasimov reportedly emphasized the "relative unimportance" of the new East German travel regulations.

The talk, which was held at Abrasimov's residence in East Berlin, was arranged by Egon Bahr, a close associate of Brandt's in the Foreign Office, in May. Brandt was accompanied by Dr. Ritzel, a member of his personal staff, and Soviet protocol officer Beletskiy who escorted the men to East Berlin in one of Abrasimov's three limousines.

The Soviets apparently hoped to keep the talk a secret as long as possible and were extremely annoyed to learn that a group of journalists had assembled at the checkpoint while the talks were still in progress.

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Allies Invoke Travel Fees for East Germans

The Allies began charging for Temporary Travel Documents (TTD's) on 21 June. A new TTD costs 20 West Marks and 10 West Marks are charged for a renewal or extension. Pensioners and other "hardship" cases continue to receive free TTD's.

Seven applicants were turned away because they lacked hard currency, but four of these subsequently returned with the required fees and TTD's were issued. None of the applicants registered annoyance or even surprise and most of their comments indicated the move was expected. The number of applicants, however, was only a fraction of the normal traffic for this time of year.

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There has been no indication that the Allied Travel Office (ATO) has been selective in the issuance of TTD's. Such selectivity as a countermeasure could backfire if the East Germans in turn began withholding visas on a broad scale to West Germans transiting the GDR. If such an impasse develops, only an extensive air shuttle system could circumvent East German restrictions.

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Working Group Session in Budapest Ends

At least 40 parties were represented at the 18-21 June Budapest meeting of the group preparing documents for the International Communist Conference later this fall.

According to the communique, there was a "comprehensive exchange of views on the content and structure of the main documents of the conference." Such a weak formulation indicates that there was no agreement on topics such as the future "struggle against imperialism" and especially on communist "unity of action." The presence of a Rumanian observer who stayed until the end of the meeting suggests that the documents were vague enough to satisfy even Bucharest.

It would appear that more preparatory meetings will be necessary before a draft acceptable to all can be hammered out at a formal session of the "Preparatory Committee" in September.

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Rumania Obstructs Proposed CEMA Conference

The Rumanian party has predictably displayed little enthusiasm for a CEMA conference proposed by the Poles and seconded by Moscow.

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The Poles proposed that such a conference include first secretaries of the Communist parties, government chiefs, and those responsible for planning in CEMA member countries. The conference was to take place in Warsaw between 22-25 June.

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Meanwhile, a Rumanian Embassy officer in Moscow told a US diplomat on 20 June that the Poles had asked the Rumanians on 25 May if they could attend a "special economic committee meeting" in Moscow from 21 to 25 June.

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We know of no current plans to convene a high-level CEMA meeting. It is possible that the proposed conference refers to plans expressed in the communique issued last March at Dresden--and to which Rumania was not invited--to hold a meeting in "the nearest future" to discuss further integration of CEMA member economies.

Whether or not the current proposal refers to Dresden, the Rumanians doubtlessly take a dim view of any such meeting. A division of labor within CEMA remains unacceptable to the Rumanians. Bucharest is vitally interested in keeping Russian initiatives channeled in bilateral cooperation rather than multilateral integration.

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Polish Regime Concerned Over Image Abroad

A 20 June meeting of the parliamentary foreign affairs commission, devoted to the "anti-Polish campaign conducted by anti-Communist and Zionist centers," is another recent indication that the leadership is concerned over the foreign and domestic impact of the anti-Semitic campaign in Poland.

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The regime has channeled the public's indignation over its poor overseas image to suit their own purposes. The regime is aware, however, that adverse foreign comment could have an impact on the internal party struggle, especially with the party congress approaching and with Gomulka so skillfully identified with "anti-Zionism" by his hardline opponents. Significantly, Gomulka is said to have held an informal party meeting in early June when he reportedly made it clear that he is aware of the damage done both to Poland's image and to many "good communists." He reportedly urged that "the party" put a stop to the campaign and reassess some of the recent purges.

It is a sign of Gomulka's current weakness that he cannot put a stop to the campaign by the weight of his authority alone. He may thus be trying to use the issue of the campaign's damage to Poland's prestige abroad and its effects on the party apparatus as a weapon against his hardline opponents.

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